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ABSTRACT

Art criticism has not been incorporated into the curriculum despite support of this proposal by major art educators. The traditional art program consists only of studio instruction to the exclusion of art criticism and art history. The studio background of most art educators coupled with the limited availability of art criticism curriculum options has perpetuated the status quo. The curriculum is a sociopolitical document which provides a lens to the subject, tempered by the dominant culture. The lack of curriculum options is a result of many factors including the weak or non-existent theoretical and research foundations of art criticism and the lack of consensus in any of the areas of art study. Art criticism formats cited include: Feldman's method consisting of analysis, interpretation, and evaluation, and Brandy's aesthetic scanning method. Fourteen other approaches exist but have not been collected in a comprehensive compilation of formats. Theoretical and research foundations of art criticism curricula include format-model parallels and format validity. Areas requiring further investigation and research include individual differences in cognitive style, social content, and the very foundations of art criticism. Four pages of references conclude the report. (BZ)

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An Analysis of the Foundations of Art Criticism Instruction: Sociopolitical Consequences of Theoretical and Research Deficits

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Running head: ART CRITICISM

Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA, April 16-20, 1986.

Abstract

Despite numerous proposals that art criticism should be part of the curriculum, art criticism instruction has not been implemented to any great extent. To examine possible reasons for this lack, the following areas will be discussed: (1) art criticism formats presented in the literature, (2) current theory and research, and (3) aspects requiring further investigation. The sociopolitical implications of not having adequate information for instructional implementation will be discussed in relationship to each of these areas.

An Analysis of the Foundations of Art Criticism Instruction: Sociopolitical Consequences of Theoretical and Research Deficits

Increasingly, art educators are proposing that the traditional art program of studio instruction be expanded to include content in art criticism and art history. This tripartite aesthetic education model can be traced to Barkan's 1965 proposal that art be treated as a discipline (Barkan, 1966); in subsequent years, Barkan's ideas have been followed by numerous curriculum guides, journal articles, and proposed programs in which the merits of such expanded study have been discussed, examined, and explicated. Yet, a 1985 national survey conducted by the J. Paul Getty Trust Fund revealed that only two school districts in the United States had any substantial and consistent art instruction in areas beyond studio production (Beyond Creating,, 1985). The purpose of this paper is to examine possible reasons for this lack of art criticism instruction despite a fairly lengthy history in the literature and support by major art educators.

In this descriptive and analytical study on art criticism, the following areas will be discussed: (1) art criticism formats presented in the literature, (2) current theoretical and research foundations of art criticism instruction, and (3) aspects needing further investigation and research. Within each of these areas, the sociopolitical, reality-shaping implications of not having adequate information for instructional implementation will be discussed. It will be noted that the theoretical and research foundations of art criticism are either weak or nonexistent in many crucial areas. When there is a paucity of

research, when related research is dispersed in other disciplines, and when much diverse research needs to be liberally interpreted to be relevant to art criticism instruction, art teachers wishing to implement art criticism have few options. A curriculum is a sociopolitical document; it allows access to particular types of knowledge and denies or obscures access to other types. As such, teachers need to be aware of and have recourse to a variety of options if such reality-shaping curriculum actions are not to be made unilaterally for them and their students.

Art Criticism Formats

Philosophical-Educational Options

At its most basic, art criticism consists of a format procedure comprised of a linear step-by-step approach whereby steps build on each other, increasingly calling for greater elaboration and analysis of the art work and often culminating in an evaluation based on specified criteria. Undoubtedly the most referred to formats are Feldman's (1981) method consisting of description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation and Broudy's (1972) aesthetic scanning that involves the exploration of sensory, formal, expressive, and technical qualities. Although these two formats have received the most attention, in a previous research review this author identified and analyzed sixteen distinct approaches (Hamblen, 1985b). That review revealed that there had been no previous comprehensive compilation of the art criticism formats that are presented throughout the literature, let alone an analysis of their accompanying explanations and an evaluation of how each relates to philosophical-educational perspectives. It was found that art criticism formats range

from those in which the process is closely monitored by the teacher and artistic exemplars are to be studied to those in which the phenomenological field of the student is given prominence and a variety of art forms is deemed worthy of study. Some art criticism formats are presented with carefully delineated instructional cues for implementation, many are not. Some authors cite supportive research findings and their theoretical rationales, others do not.

It is not the purpose of this present paper to recapitulate the above-cited review, but rather to refer to the findings from that review as indicating that a limited perspective is now available for curriculum planners. With two art critical approaches being most commonly cited, and, in fact, with aesthetic scanning being discussed as the chosen procedure for the Getty Trust Fund's interpretation of discipline-based art education (Hausman, 1985), teachers are not being given the full-spectrum of format options. More alarmingly, they are not being given information on the sociopolitical and philosophical lenses provided by different art critical approaches.

Format Option Limitations

An art criticism procedure is often presented by its author as the correct approach to understanding art (Hamblen, in press). As it will be noted later, the steps of an art criticism format are often cited as being similar to some panhuman activity, such as visual perception, ways of learning, cognitive development, and so on. On the positive side, format similarities to perceptual, conceptual, and even moral development provide valuable theoretical foundations and fertile areas for research. On the negative side, such claims have tended to imply that a particular

approach has a validity and a truth extending well beyond the understanding of such and such art objects.

How a limited perspective on limited art criticism options becomes manifest is revealed by looking at the manner in which some curriculum planners are making art criticism choices. For example, an apparent assumption of some discipline-based art education proponents is that a consensus of the learned is possible in identifying art concepts and skills, selecting art objects worthy of study, and in delineating educational procedures (DiBlasio, 1985; Broudy, 1985; Greer, 1984; Smith, 1984). A perusal of art education texts should quickly dispel any optimism that a consensus can be arrived at in any of the areas of art study, including that of art criticism. As Hausman (1985) aptly notes, "in aesthetics, 'scanning' describes an approach that would not be widely accepted by many aestheticians" (p. 53).

The use of a particular art criticism procedure needs to be considered as a curriculum choice made for certain types of outcomes, rather than as being inherently correct or as tapping into any larger truth that extends beyond the analysis of art. Unless a range of art criticism curriculum options is made available and unless they are presented as proceeding from particular philosophical bases, teachers will have to rely on choices that are made for them. This should be considered an untenable if not an unethical situation.

Theoretical and Research Foundations of Art Criticism

Philosophical Aesthetics

Philosophical aesthetics provides the primary theoretical rationale

for art criticism (Hamblen, in press). Aesthetic criteria are cited as the basis for art critical judgments, and aspects of the art critical process have been linked to aesthetic theories. At its most basic, the art critical process involves the examination and evaluation of an object's characteristics as these reveal meaning and provide significance.

Although there are cautions in the literature that art criticism should not be considered a substitute for the aesthetic experience, there is a strong tendency to equate the two or to suggest that art criticism acts as a means of sensitizing the individual to aesthetic awareness (Broudy,1972; Smith, 1967). Not only do such claims unnecessarily burden the art critical educational process, they also tend to bracket the art critical act from individual meaning and art's social context, thereby often resulting in a formalistic stance wherein relationships among art's formal elements become the content of art and criteria for evaluation. Expanding the art critical options to include, for example, approaches that are phenomenological (Lankford, 1984) or decidedly social and historical (Nadaner, 1984) would clearly reveal that unless one's intent is to limit the process to intrinsic qualities (which may be valid), there is no necessary mandate to exclude any information that is relevant to understanding the art object. A limited research base, the selection of and explication of only certain formats, and the relating of formats to aesthetic acuity and panhuman activities results in an imbalance that favors impersonal, formalistic, and asocial interpretations of art. With an adequate research base, this focus could be understood as merely one curriculum stance among many other possibilities.

It is not being claimed that all art critical approaches are equally valid, but rather that any one approach is only valid to the extent that it is compatible with one's intent, with student abilities, desired outcomes, or some other set of criteria--all of which need to be clearly articulated and examined. Access to a range of curriculum options, research findings, and differing theoretical rationales would enable curriculum planners to act in a reflexive manner, conscious of the meanings, implications, and consequences of their choices. Schulman (1986) defines a professional as one who "is capable of not only practicing and understanding his or her craft, but of communicating the reasons for professional decisions and actions to others" (p. 13). This is not a matter of merely being articulate, but rather, more importantly, of understanding where one's actions fit within the larger scheme of things. Schulman states this as an overall goal of professional quality.

> The vision I hold of teaching and teacher education is a vision of professionals who are capable not only of acting, but of enacting--of acting in a manner that is self-conscious with respect to what their act is a case of, or to what their act entails. (p. 13)

Ironically, if the aesthetic base of art criticism were adhered to in substance as well as spirit, art criticism curriculum choices would be seen as inherently problematic inasmuch as art is a contested concept that eludes any defining set of criteria (Weitz, 1962). The aesthetic base of art criticism, however, has primarily been interpreted within the principles of modern aesthetic theory wherein it is assumed that the aesthetic affords noninstrumental experiences separate from the

exigencies of social and personal life. Such an interpretation of aesthetic experiences, and, by extension, art criticism procedures, tends to elevate art criticism beyond variability.

Format-Model Parallels

Reference is often made to cognitive, perception, learning, and moral awareness models as providing the theoretical rationale for particular art criticism procedures. Human development studies have been commonly related to artistic production over time; in art criticism, developmental theories are related to the actual configuration of the format itself. For example, art critical levels of description, analysis, and so on, have been paralleled to the cognitive stages of Piaget (Kordich, 1982) in that both frameworks involve an increasing sense of abstraction and de-emphasis of ego. In a similar manner, the hierarchical categories of the learning models of Bloom and Gagne (Armstrong & Armstrong, 1977; Hamblen, 1984) and the perceptual models of Arnheim (1969) and Bruner (1958) have been likened to the steps of various art criticism formats. These models and art criticism formats have in common a progression from lower levels of diffused, concrete, and spontaneous responses to higher levels requiring differentiation, abstraction, and depersonalized ways of dealing with phenomena.

Conceptual and structural similarities among cognitive levels, perceptual processes, and learning theories have provided valuable theoretical rationales for particular art criticism procedures as well as suggested areas for related research. For example, in relating art criticism levels to cognitive stages, Kordich (1982) found them to be commensurate in many respects. Although younger children could deal

with higher levels of art criticism involving analysis and evaluation, their responses were less detailed, involved fewer discriminations, and were based on literal qualities and personal preferences. Few developmental studies, however, have been conducted specifically in relationship to art criticism and, as will be noted shortly, most studies must be broadly interpreted to have relevance to art criticism instruction.

Format Validity

Relying on similarities between the structure of a format and some panhuman, pansocial activity such as perception or learning in order to provide the theoretical base for art criticism has ambivalent results. Format and model similarities can mark jumping off points for important research that can provide information on such aspects, for example, as when children will be able to perceive, analyze, and verbalize stylistic differences. By the same token, format and model similarities can divert attention from the philosophical and sociopolitical lenses a particular art critical approach provides. Piaget's cognitive model is particularly applicable to logical, mathematical concepts and, in general, to mental skills valued in Western cultures. Likewise, Bloom's taxonomy is far from being a value-free pedagogical model (Hamblen, 1984).

Although an art criticism format's outward, formal structure cannot be literally considered equivalent to its substance, it is a manifestation of its author's goals, purposes, and perspectives. It is indicative of particular assumptions as to how it is believed students can come to perceive, understand, and value art. For example, Clements

(1979) proposes an inductive art criticism methodology that parallels the scientific method. The danger of this or any other art criticism procedure having a validity based on format and process similarities is that an unwarranted truth and correctness of action may be implied or even directly claimed. When a variety of art criticism formats is available for review and curriculum selection and when their reality-shaping assumptions are clearly stated, the curriculum planner can see that each has its merits for particular types of outcomes that may or may not be significant to a panhuman activity. First and foremost, art criticism instruction needs to be considered an educational process.

Areas Requiring Further Investigation and Research

Individual Differences, and Social Content

With a limited number of formats consistently discussed and with formats often related to panhuman activities, aspects such as individual differences and social content have received short-shrift in the literature. Lovano-Kerr (1983) notes that how students will relate to a given art criticism procedure may depend upon their particular cognitive style.

> The various approaches to art criticism and aesthetic perception may be favoring one mode of processing information over the other. The emphasis of parts to the whole, restructuring, and hypotheses-testing may exclude persons with a global style (field-dependent). Conversely, approaches focusing on mood, feeling, and intuition may exclude persons with a more articulated style (field-independent). A better understanding of these influences in responding to art could be basic to instructional development, teaching, and learning. (p. 202)

Housen (1980), in a study of museum audiences, found that lecture tours were successful with visitors concerned with historical placement and knowledge about the artist, style, and period. Those visitors with a more subjective focus benefited from tour techniques employing active participation.

Comments and studies such as these on individual differences as they relate to art critical responses are few in number. Most often the emphasis is on the qualities of the art object per se wherein the long-range intent is to wean individuals away from their idiosyncratic responses so that critical comments are firmly referenced to the perceptual characteristics of the object. For example, Chapman (1978) discusses four art criticism formats--inductive, deductive, interactive, empathic--on the basis of how different critical outcomes result from using different approaches, not how certain types of individuals might be compatible with a certain type of approach. In noting parallels between art theories and the steps of art criticism formats, Mittler (1982) suggests that a theory be selected to guide the art critical process on the basis of the character of the object. In most art criticism formats the focus is foremost on the object, not how the individual might relate to the object. Although such a disinterested, decontextualized approach might be necessary for journalistic, scholarly, or other types of professional art criticism, in educational settings the abilities and learning styles of students need to be taken into consideration. The successful use of an art criticism format needs to be assessed on the basis of its compatibility with cognitive styles,

individual preferences, and meaningful learning outcomes rather than a supposed validity inherent within the format itself. With adequate research could come the understanding that any art criticism format is primarily a curriculum option rather than an exclusively correct view on art or a manifestation of the way to make contact with a panhuman activity.

Foundations of Art Criticism

An initial, psychological foundation of art criticism would need to incorporate findings on language development, conceptual development, perceptual theory, and learning theory. Concerted efforts also need to be made to incorporate information from the areas of sociology and cross-cultural aesthetics. It is significant that although art criticism is a linguistic act entailing some form of description, analysis, and evaluation, there is no widely accepted developmental linguistic framework analogous to the steps of children's graphic expression. An often-stated goal of art criticism instruction is to develop responses relevant to the intrinsic characteristics of the art object. Yet, there is no clearly explicated linguistic developmental scheme that would indicate transitions toward that goal. It is not being suggested that such a developmental scheme would offer any type of panacea for implementing art criticism instruction. The problems, errors, and inconsistencies that have resulted from relying on a developmental framework for artistic expression need to be heeded (Hamblen, 1985a). A general linguistic framework, however, would be helpful and would represent an initial step toward establishing the foundations of art criticism. Art criticism research is in its infancy; the lack of even a reductionist, simplistic linguistic framework is

symptomatic of art criticism's rudimentary stage of development.

Since there are current movements to implement art criticism instruction, some difficult research choices will need to be made, and, unfortunately, some short cuts taken. Primary research in the above-cited areas certainly would be preferable, however, it is doubtful whether either the time or energy exists to provide numerous studies specific to art criticism concerns. For this reason, it would appear that primary research will need to be heavily supplemented by data from relevant studies carried out in such areas as experimental aesthetics, developmental psychology, perception, and linguistics. Studies by researchers such as Feinstein (1984), Hardiman and Zernich (1977), Koroscik (1985), Parsons, Johnston, and Durham (1978), Winner (1979), Winner, Rosenstiel, and Gardner (1976) contain information that could be interpreted as relevant to art criticism responses and instruction. Proceeding without an adequate theoretical and research base has resulted in art criticism formats being presented as avenues to invariant truths, a reliance on findings in the social sciences and other disciplines as to how to deal with responses to art (Chapman, 1985), and, in some instances, curriculum goals that are inconsistent with fairly well-established research findings (Visual and Performing Arts, 1982).

Summary

Elsewhere, this author has discussed the economics of studio materials, the studio background of most art educators, and the all-too-human reluctance to change the status quo as factors contributing to the

continuance of the studio model of art instruction (Hamblen, 1983a; 1983b). Although these are not insignificant in assessing the current status of art criticism instruction, they certainly share influence with the status of theoretical and research foundations of art criticism instruction. Once a decision is made to include art criticism in one's instructional pattern, the success and quality of the program, or even whether instruction will actually be initiated, is dependent upon the information that is available. The art criticism formats available and their accompanying literature constitute the curriculum planner's starting point. How art criticism has been researched and presented in the literature is symptomatic of the problems that develop when adequate information is not easily accessible or is not presented as emanating from particular sociopolitical and philosophical perspectives. Rush (1985) has called research a form of "consumer protection" (p. 195). The current state of art criticism instruction may serve as a paradigm of the consequences that result when such consumer protection is lacking.

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